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Genuinely made up: camp, baroque, and other denaturalizing aesthetics in the cultural production of the real

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The link that Jean-Jacques Rousseau forged a long time ago between the 'real' and the 'natural' has proved to be indissoluble. Time and again, contemporary constructions of the real mobilize all that can be linked to nature. Inauthentic, by contrast, is that which is fabricated, made up, artificial, the all-too-evident result of human design. In Bahia, Brazil, the author encountered a completely different mode in the cultural production of the real. Analysing the performance of a Bahian drag queen who goes by the name of Gina da Mascar, the author discusses 'camp' and 'baroque' as registers that foster a sensibility for (and appreciation of) cultural forms that are 'truly false'. He shows how the appeal of these registers – their persuasiveness, their form of truth-telling – resonates with the sensibilities of people whose biographies are marked by radical discontinuities, and he argues that these registers might be understood as a popular articulation of the Lacanian understanding that *symbolic closure* is an impossibility.

Some years ago, on the occasion of the Gay Pride Parade, the Amsterdam zoo *Natura Artis Magistra* ('Nature is the Teacher of Art') had organized a guided tour to bring homosexual relationships between animals to the attention of the public. In announcements of the event, it was stated that 'there are quite a number of homosexual animals in Artis, including gay cockatoos, monkeys, bulls, goats and elephants'.¹ It was further added that 'homosexuality is quite normal in the animal kingdom' and that 'homosexual behavior has been observed in 1,500 species'. Clearly, the organizers sought to communicate that nature itself contradicts the prejudice that homosexuality is 'a sin against nature'. Homosexual behavior is as much part of the natural order as heterosexual behavior, so they seemed to be arguing.² 'Given that even animals do it, it is only natural!'

The rhetorical move in this argument suggests that where nature speaks, human arguments lose their weight and import. The persuasive power of this rhetoric is grounded in a long history of Western thought on 'the natural', whereby the philosophy of the Enlightenment declared the natural order to be the ontological ground of being, and the Romantics repositioned that foundational essence in the 'inner self' (Taylor 1989; Thomas 1996). The natural has become the testing ground for what is genuine and what is not. A reassurance of our understandings of self, other, and the world is to be

sought in the 'way that nature resonates in us' (Taylor 1989: 299), or, to phrase it somewhat differently, in our attempts to reach *symbolic closure* – the reassuring sense that 'things are as they are because they could not have been otherwise' – the natural is granted a leading role. Take the hippie-ish household where I grew up in the late 1960s. Life-style choices would always move in the direction of home-made bread, unbleached cotton, unshaved armpits, macramé placemats, coarse earthenware plates, and freshly picked field flowers: an aesthetics that introduced the comforting, reassuring presence of the natural in a tumultuous world, where much that had seemed self-evident – what to believe, how to entertain relationships, which career-paths to choose, how to achieve happiness – had been questioned and rejected. A more contemporary example of how we have all acquired Romantic sensibilities is the commercial success of '100 per cent natural' products, which somehow promise that even the market forces unleashed in the neoliberal world order might bring you back to your roots. Or one might think of the way the exclamation 'goose bumps!' has become an expression of one's genuine appreciation of a concert, movie, or play: one no longer says 'I happen to like this', one mobilizes an uncontrollable physical response such as 'goose bumps', which somehow suggests that nature itself is passing judgement on the quality of the performance.

The attempt to ground homosexuality in the order of nature (and thus beyond dispute) exemplifies a similar Romantic logic. What is so intriguing about this latter example, however, is that the attempt at naturalization clashes with another powerful register of sense-making operative in gay circles that is known as 'camp'. As I will elaborate in more detail below, camp is characterized by its relentless attempts to undo the naturalization of cultural forms and practices. It fosters a sensibility for the falsity that is at the heart of much that presents itself as natural and it incites its adepts to unmask the natural and expose it as yet another form of make-believe. Thus, in the example of the Amsterdam zoo, a camp sensibility immediately draws attention to the fact that the enumeration of the zoo's allegedly gay inhabitants included cockatoos (with their coloured feathers a highly 'queer' species), bulls ('virile', 'macho' animals now unmasked as mere 'muscle Mary's'), as well as elephants (allowing for all kinds of jokes on the matter of 'size'). It is through such campy re-framings that the attempted naturalization of homosexuality is undermined. In a camp reading of things, animals are no longer indexical of nature. They become allegorical figures of homosexual desire.

Camp is certainly not the only style that seeks to undo the 'naturalizations' that dominate a given cultural order. In their own particular ways, the baroque, many modernist styles of the twentieth century, pop art, and punk are examples of aesthetic registers that do not seek recourse to tropes of the natural to produce a sense of what is given, incontestable, and real. They dismiss the thought that the natural is the human default setting, 'life as it was meant to be' or 'the way we really are'. They reject mobilizations of the natural as mere fantasies, which, while they last, may produce symbolic closure, yet are destined to wither away. Instead, these aesthetic registers opt for forms that are 'truly false', or, more accurately, forms that are 'true in their being false'. They thus highlight that 'faking it' ('playing a role that the larger culture has already scripted and that your inner being somehow feels is not quite your own', as William Miller [2003: 200] once wrote) is all we ever do, part and parcel of our constitution as social and cultural beings.

This revelation of the impossibility of symbolic closure in denaturalizing aesthetics, which constantly reminds you that 'things might well have been totally different!', is intriguingly reminiscent of the position taken by culture theorists such as Slavoj Žižek,

Yannis Stavrakakis, and Terry Eagleton. Inspired by the teachings of Jacques Lacan, these thinkers take as a starting-point for cultural analysis the fundamental lack that lies at the heart of the symbolic order. They keep pointing out that the symbolic order – *any* symbolic order – fails in its attempts to subject the Grand Totality of Being to its definitions of what reality is. Our ability to make sense of ourselves and of the world is tied to structures of meaning that do violence to what William James succinctly called ‘the plenum of existence’ (cited in Jackson 1989: 3). Our reality definitions are limiting; they require that we repress certain perceptions, experiences, and understandings; they depend on prohibitions and taboos to mystify their contingent nature; they demand that we blind and desensitize ourselves; and they thus produce an infinite realm of ‘impossible’, ‘non-sensical’, or ‘absurd’ sense-perceptions. Inevitably, so these thinkers argue, this repressed ‘surplus’ of meaning besieges the fortresses of meaning in which we have taken refuge. In the Lacanian terminology of these thinkers, this-reality-beyond-our-definition-of-reality is labelled *the Real*, a real that is not dependent on human definitions as to what constitutes reality, and as such obstructs all human attempts to reach symbolic closure.

The focus of these theorists on the ‘failing’ of the symbolic order – their ‘camp’ sensibility for the make-believe that goes into the cultural production of the real – does not, however, mean that they descry lack and incompleteness always and everywhere. Quite to the contrary: focusing on the ‘lack’ that is at the heart of all meaning production, they insistently ask what it is that allows us ‘to act as if mischief were not afoot in the kingdom of the real and that all around the ground lay firm’ (Taussig 1993: xvii). Asking how people manage to keep the ‘surplus’ of our understanding of reality at bay, they have pointed out the pivotal role of fantasy in covering up the rents, fissures, and black holes in the structure of meaning, producing the very coherence that reality defies. They have also explored how symbolic closure is subjectively achieved in the register of the ‘imaginary’ – the subjective, experiential mode of knowing of the mystic, the athlete, the performance artist, the writer-in-flow; a being-aware-of-things that does not depend on the discriminations and separations of the symbolic, and signals our capacity to perceive subject and object, self and world ‘as being tailor-made for one another’ (Eagleton 2009: 10); the ability to perceive the world as being ‘on familiar terms with us, conforming obediently to our desires and bending to our motions as obsequiously as one’s reflection in the glass’ (Eagleton 2009: 10).

It is exactly this investigation of what I would call *the cultural production of the real* that makes the writings of these thinkers so exciting. Rather than arguing once more that the worlds of meaning we inhabit are made up (our authenticities ‘staged’; our communities ‘imagined’; our traditions ‘invented’), these scholars ask how these constructions come to be subjectively perceived as fully real. From a Lacanian perspective, then, Romantic celebrations of the natural – field flowers in a suburban living room, unbleached cotton curtains, gay cockatoos in an Amsterdam zoo – are fantasy formations. They produce symbolic closure by screening off just what little of a ‘natural life’ remains in contemporary living. Yet the more intriguing question to ask is: what might the Lacanian approach tell us about the denaturalizing aesthetics mentioned above? This, then, will be the central issue in this article. How to understand the appeal of styles that highlight the fakeness of the natural; underscore the impossibility of symbolic closure; and bring home to us that nothing can be taken for granted as ‘things might well have been totally different’? What alternative trajectory in the cultural production of the real do these styles propose? Wherein lies their persuasiveness? To

whom do these styles appeal? And last but not least: what alternative sensations of the real do these styles produce? Exploring the denaturalizing aesthetics that dominates the site of my fieldwork – Salvador da Bahia, Brazil – I will show that nature is not the only anchor-ground for the real. A sense of the genuine, the incontestable, the *really* real may also be grounded in that other main ingredient of Lacanian thought: *desire*.

Gina da Mascar's production of the really real

Bahia, Brazil, where I have been doing research for over a decade, is an interesting place to ponder the authenticity of fake, the truth of falsity, the real of the made up. In their aesthetic preferences, many Bahians opt wholeheartedly for the evident fabrication; for that which is undeniably made up. The real of the 'natural' is certainly an upcoming discourse in the more alternative circles in the capital Salvador, and is increasingly found in advertising, interior design, 'natural' body products, eco tourism, and health food discourses. On the whole, however, the 'natural' does not seem to have much of an appeal. No bouquets of wild flowers in Bahia, but stiffly arranged floral decorations that evoke images of a florist trying hard to simulate a plastic flower arrangement with natural materials. No cravings for long walks on deserted beaches, where one can feel 'reunited with nature', but the intensely social spectacle of densely populated sands, a colourful and noisy amalgam of tattooed bodies, plastic beach chairs, umbrellas in screaming colours, the artificial smell of coconut tanning oil, and the blaring sounds of boom-boxes. No homosexuals pointing to the animal world to claim their rightful place in the order of the natural, but transvestites who artfully metamorphose their male bodies with large amounts of silicone to arrive at female forms, yet would not dream of having 'the final operation'.

A Bahian drag queen who goes by the name of Gina da Mascar (Fig. 1) – wildly popular with the patrons who frequent a couple of down-and-out gay bars in central



Figure 1. Gina da Mascar. (Photograph by the author.)

Salvador – epitomizes all of these tendencies. Her performances, which I have come to appreciate as a bawdy, popular ‘seminar’ on the failure of the symbolic order and the Lacanian notion of the Real, are an apt starting-point to explore this alternative trajectory in the cultural production of the real: to ponder the question how things which are genuinely made up produce their own sensation of truth and the really real.

Gina da Mascar has little in common with the glamorous female impersonators and hyper-feminine *travestis* who frequent Salvador’s gay bars. Gina paints some of her teeth black, suggestive of a dental decay that is immediately associated with the great many *marginais* – the homeless, the down-and-out, the crack users – who roam the streets of Salvador. The foundation she uses for her make-up is quite a few shades lighter than the skin tone of Aldo Zeck, the man underneath the powder, whom I got to know as a *mulato* from the neighbouring state of Alagoas. Her wigs are messy, teased and spiked, and they frequently change their color: from black to red, and from peroxide blond to blue. Many of her dresses are ragged, exposing a plump body with every move she makes. Then there is her voice, which has something oddly metallic to it, a monotony reminiscent of cheap plastic baby dolls that speak a sentence when you pull a cord on their back. It is a voice that is well suited for the rackety world that is Gina’s habitat: the Beco dos Artistas, a blind alley in central Salvador with a couple of lower-class gay bars where one always has to shout to make oneself heard (Fig. 2).

On a little video on YouTube the drag queen is being asked to introduce herself:

– So who is Gina da Mascar?

– Well ... What shall I say? I’m still looking for a definition, but I haven’t found it yet! In fact, all that I know is that she is lost. For a long time I have been searching for the treasure that is Gina, but in fact nobody knows who she is or where she came from.³



Figure 2. The Beco dos Artistas, Salvador da Bahia. (Photograph by the author.)

Respect. Performance artists should have the first (and the last) word about their creations. In my allegory, however, Gina da Mascar will be staged as Failure Incorporated. Failed hair-do, failed make-over, failed etiquette. Failed femininity (not to mention masculinity). Failed drag queen (Gina metamorphosed out of the glamorous *drag de luxo* called Nina Blanch). Failed Bambi, given the unsuccessful attempt to upgrade her caressability by painting enormous Walt-Disneyish eyelashes on her face. Moreover, in the world that is the Beco dos Artistas, where the majority of people are black and poor, and where whatever of the latest one has managed to purchase at such middle-range clothing stores as Sarttore's or Lojas Americanas is already cause for long-drawn 'ooooohs!' and 'aaaaahs!', Gina da Mascar's bedraggled sartorial appearance is also: failed person-of-colour-wanting-to-look-white, failed modernity, failed consumerism.

- Hey, Gina, who is the sexiest man of them all?
- The one who I picked up yesterday in [the squatter settlement] Gamboa! His nails were about 30 cm long! And a bath? Hadn't taken one for two months. He was such a treat!

Her shows, every Wednesday night in a bar annex nightclub called 'The Backstage', are – again – a grand spectacle of Failure. Gina da Mascar constantly aborts her own ambitions to be a proper drag queen by unplugging the sound-system while singing playback, or by suddenly walking out of her own little dance routine. She smells her armpits to check her body odour and grimaces with disgust. She farts in her microphone. Her hands seem to have an agenda of their own, as they keep fingering her body at intimate places. Her sentences seem to be going nowhere. Her politics are corrupted the very moment she articulates them. When asked what she plans to do for the New Year, she states:

We'll have lots of sex with love, lots of sex with sex, we'll seriously play the whore (*vamos fazer putaria com seriedade*)! And we'll put on a condom. We'll put on a little plastic bag from the Bompreço [a major supermarket chain in Bahia], we'll put on a little plastic ice-cube bag (*um saquinho do geladinho*). For in the end, all that matters is to come!

Gina da Mascar's performance would be misrepresented by solely pointing out the issues of gender and sexuality she addresses. In her interactions with the audience, every imaginable category, identity, role, or act is broken open so as to reveal its imperfection. Ladies' bags are confiscated and publicly inspected as to their contents ('You find their identity cards, with photographs of what they looked like years ago, half a piece of bread with tomato, a condom, the kind of money they bring to an evening out. I call this part of the show *intimidade* (intimacy)', Aldo Zeck said in an interview). Ruthlessly, Gina defaces any carefully built imago. Mercilessly, she shows the hopelessness of all attempts to put up a convincing performance in the terms that culture provides. Better not be dragged onto her stage and be submitted to one of her 'interviews'. Undoubtedly, she would insinuate that those *gringo* anthropologists do the strangest things to get laid by a *negão* (big black man) from The Backstage (or something to that effect). For it is desire – of the sexual, lustful kind – that is the one and only phenomenon Gina seems to take at face value.

- Gina, what is it that you want most for people in the new year?
- All of the best! The happiness that is sized 27 cm or more! From behind, from the sides, from the front! The important thing is to come. Darling, don't hold back, give yourself to what is so fantastic!

Her audiences devour this spectacle. They revel in it, as they shout insults and obscenities at the top of their voices, spurring Gina on to go even further in her radical proposition that everything but the 27 cm-sized-tool-to-happiness is fake. They let themselves be pushed on stage, cheered on by friends, vaguely pretending to be hesitant and unwilling, then to let themselves be undressed by Gina. Literally: all the way down to their (oftentimes remarkably fashionable) underwear – or further. Yet the undressing is also a kind of ‘unfaking’, an unpacking of the pose so as to get to the real of things. ‘Nice shirt. Hmmm! Nice underwear! And where are you from? Ah! Valéria [a poor, semi-urban neighbourhood at the far limits of the city]! People! This one is from Valéria!’

Occasionally, even Gina’s own project of staging failure fails. That’s when things really start to chafe. For instance, I recall how one evening, Gina switched to another, more serious register to seek public recognition for her Art. The claim was fair enough, considering the radical stuff she does. Coming from her mouth, however, this re-erection of Art as a category of Unquestioned Cultural Value – and the desire to be included in that category – undermined a performance that sought to expose such categories – all categories – as mere make-believe.

Understanding ‘camp’/understanding ‘*montado*’

As a seasoned homosexual, I immediately recognized the performance of Gina da Mascar as an example of camp. This was ‘my’ kind of humour, ‘my’ kind of world-making: I instantly understood this kind of fun and mockery, and joined in with the laughter. As a right-minded anthropologist, however, I urged myself not to jump to conclusions: the notion of camp cannot be transposed to the Beco dos Artistas just like that. To begin with, in this setting hardly anyone could tell you what ‘camp’ is. When I asked Aldo Zeck during our interview, for instance, he had no clue as to what I was talking about.

The expression in Bahian Portuguese that comes closest to the notion of camp is ‘*montado*’ (literally: assembled). To characterize Gina da Mascar as such is to highlight her made-upness; her make-up, her wigs, her over-the-topness; indeed, the inescapable fact that she has ‘put herself together’. Yet, as stated, this made-upness is being performed in a setting where notions of the natural and the artificial, the real and the made-up, appearance and essence are not grounded in the Romantic heritage, and therefore understood differently. So what to make of my instant, intuitive recognition of the humour in Gina da Mascar’s performance (‘This is camp!’)? Was my observation that these performances seamlessly fitted the spirit of camp a misreading of a local genre that can only be understood and analysed in its own terms? Was I roaring with laughter for all the wrong reasons? Or do seasoned Dutch homosexuals and bawdy Bahian *transformistas* share experiences that allow for joined laughter?

Camp has almost exclusively been discussed within the framework of Euro-American gay scenes. In her pioneering essay ‘Notes on “Camp”’, Susan Sontag wrote that ‘the essence of Camp is its love of the *unnatural*: of artifice and exaggeration’ (1990: 280, italics mine). ‘Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a “lamp”; not a woman, but a “woman”. To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater’ (1990: 280). This ‘theater’ that is camp is indeed one big exposition of hair-sprayed do’s, plastic roses, artificial suntans, garish colours, and the

glitzy kitsch of fake diamonds. The aficionados of the style prefer French poodles to German Shepherds, Bette Davis to Marilyn Monroe, the pumped-up muscles of Tom of Finland's drawings to the sensuous photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe. Camp is to take seriously ABBA love songs, Versace sunglasses, and the chemically induced bliss of Viagra and Ecstasy. Camp is also indulging in the veritable verbal duals that take place late at night in gay bars, where sharp-tongued 'queens' delight in tearing apart each and every appearance so as to reveal the fake and make-believe that go into a public presentation of self. Camp, in brief, situates truthfulness in that which is false. And by doing so, it is an all-out attack on that which grants cultural forms a semblance of self-evidence.

It is important to note, however, that camp's constant incentive to reveal the pose, the made-up character of that which presents itself as 'natural', can never be equated with mere cynicism or irony. To the contrary, the leitmotif in camp that fake is the greater truth never mitigates a sentimental yearning for reconciliation with nature. The declaration that the natural is false only fuels a desperate faith that – somewhere, over the rainbow – a reunion with nature might come about. No one articulates this better than Agrado, the transvestite from Pedro Almodóvar's famous movie *Tudo sobre me madre* (*All about My Mother*). On her thoroughly 're-formed' body, she stated:

I am very authentic ... The reshaping of my eyes, eighty thousand pesetas. Nose, two hundred thousand. A waste of money, as a year later someone punched it. ... Breasts, two, because I'm not a monster. Seventy each. Silicones in my lips, forehead, cheeks, hips, behind. Hundred thousand for one litre of that stuff. You do the counting yourself, I long lost track ... Chin correction, seventy-five thousand. Permanent laser hair removal – as women too descend from the apes – sixty thousand per treatment. All I want to say: it costs to be authentic ...

All the joking and self-mockery in this scene can't conceal that Agrado offered all to carve her dreamed-up self in the flesh. The body, indexical of our natural constitution, becomes, in camp, the locus of a desire for exactly that which the style dismisses as impossible: a reunion with nature. Camp is to shed tears – real, warm, salty body fluids – in the full awareness that Maria Callas's arias are larger than life. Camp is the body that gets excited over the pictures of Tom of Finland, however much the mind may have concluded that these 'horse-hung' and pumped-up males only exist in the exaggerations of fantasy. Camp is to keep up the sentimental dream of True Love in the darkroom. Camp is to disassemble everything to conclude that, indeed, in the end only the happiness-that-is-27-cm-long stands firm.

Taking into account these desirous dimensions, camp is not only homosexual resistance against the conventions of a hetero-normative world. Camp is also a deeply nostalgic style. One might even say that it is the aesthetic of a diasporic community that cherishes an impossible desire for the self-evident, 'natural' forms of existence from which gays have been exiled. This melancholic dimension of camp permeates Esther Newton's classic study, *Mother Camp*, discussing female impersonators in pre-Stonewall America. For all of their wit and sharp-tongued attacks on mainstream normativity, these drag artists were convinced that their cravings and ways of being were 'unnatural'. Camp allowed them to question the natural, showing it to be 'an act', and by doing so, says Newton, camp made living immoral, 'unnatural' lives *bearable*

(1972: 130). Yet camp did not liberate them from a Romantic legacy which equates the natural with the real, nor did it provide them with an alternative to be – as Agrado put it – ‘authentic’.

It is exactly this nostalgia for a reunion with the real of nature that I found missing in the Beco dos Artistas, and it is this absence of melancholy that gives *montado* aesthetics a different feel. In Salvador, as stated before, ‘the natural’ is not constantly mobilized to upgrade the reality calibre of cultural constructions. Beyond a small, cosmopolitan elite, which is in touch with Romanticist conceptions of the natural, I do not find many Bahians making the ‘inward journey’ to register the way that nature ‘resonates inside’ (Taylor 1989: 301) and to thus find a solid ground for conceptions of self. The fact that things are obviously constructed, plastic, or ‘unnatural’ does not immediately kick them out of the order of the real. Alex Edmonds’s wonderful study of cosmetic surgery in Rio de Janeiro, for instance, shows, page after page, the ease with which many Brazilians change their bodies through plastic surgery (Edmonds 2010). This re-making of the body is not problematized much in the Brazilian setting. Of course, says Edmonds, there are jokes about *siliconadas* (women who inject silicon in their bodies to arrive at perfect female shapes) who turn the *sambadrome* in Rio (the venue where the great carnival parades are held) into ‘silicon valley’, or about the eco-hazards of burying such women, and there are the occasional comments that liposuction and silicone have robbed beauty of its ‘authenticity’ (2010: 72). The overwhelming evidence of Edmonds’s study, however, shows that when it comes to beauty practices, people are not at all bothered by the artifice of beauty. To the contrary, they proudly display newly made breasts and butts, unhampered by the thought that these would be somehow less ‘real’.

Another study that discusses Brazilian understandings of the natural and the artificial is Don Kulick’s ethnography of *travestis* in Salvador.⁴ Kulick states that artificiality and naturalness ‘exist in an uneasy and agitated relationship in travesti thought’ (1998: 200). On the one hand, *travestis* recognize the ideal of looking like a ‘natural’ woman. ‘Despite the fact that travestis use highly artificial means to attain the bodies they possess’, says Kulick, ‘they still esteem naturalness’ (1998: 198). He also mentions a ‘widespread conviction among travestis that individuals who do not require a great deal of artificial aid to become beautiful are even more impressive than those who do’ (1998: 200); and that ‘natural forms and natural femininity are desirable’ (1998: 201). On the other hand, however, Kulick reports that the making of the femininity of the *travesti* is highly appreciated. *Travestis* pride themselves that ‘they occupy [the] feminine space better than women do’ (1998: 203); that they are more attractive than real women because they ‘work harder’ to be one (1998: 203). Instead of being merely a woman, they consider themselves to be *mulheríssima*. Kulick understands such *travesti* talk about being ‘super-women’ as *compensation* for ‘the uncertainty of not having what men want, a *buceita* (the vagina)’. ‘Artificiality’, he says, ‘is admired but naturalness is revered’ (1998: 204). As noted before, I have not found such Romanticist notions in the Beco dos Artistas. In fact, all that Kulick’s own rich ethnographic material shows is an unresolved tension over the issue, not the taking up of a final position (and I can’t help but wonder to what extent the issue of ‘naturalness’ was introduced in the scene by the ethnographer’s questioning in the first place).

In Gina da Mascar’s performances, the opposition is between artifice well done, which results in a gorgeous, glamorous woman (*‘tudo arrumadinha’*, as Aldo Zeck described his earlier creation Nina Blanch, ‘all neatly made up’), and artifice gone

wrong, leading to a monstrous figure ('When people call Gina *gostosa* [sexy, desirable], she gets upset and irritated, because she knows that people are being dishonest with her'). The ideal of the 'natural' simply does not appear in her show – let alone reconciliation with nature. Thus, when during the interview with Aldo Zeck we discussed the stripping naked of volunteer boys from the audience that is a fixed part of the show ('God only knows why they allow Gina to do it!', he exclaimed), he told me that what Gina does is 'unmasking' – *tirar as máscaras*. Yet what remains after such stripping in the Bahian setting is not a naked body that indexes our belonging to nature. Judging from Gina's utterings and actions on stage, the body in *montado* aesthetics is indexical of ecstasy, lust, orgasm, experiences of bliss, as well as a container of the abject, of waste and disgusting excretions. This body indexes what Lacanian thinkers would call *jouissance*, the amoral pleasure that can be derived from evading the social and moral order; from escaping 'meaning'; from being liberated from the social and the socially produced self (Fiske 1989: 50). Rather than confirming our belonging to nature, says Julia Kristeva, this body draws us 'towards the place where meaning collapses' (1982 [1980]: 2).

Remarkable as the contrast may be between camp (with its melancholic resonances) and *montado* aesthetics (reminiscent of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque), this difference should not be made absolute. Both aesthetics produce a body that is an effect of the failure of the symbolic order, rather than an instance of the natural. Both aesthetics respond to the existential condition that the worlds of meaning we inhabit are human-made, forever lacking in their pretension to encompass the totality of life, and, consequently, forever producing anomalies (such as homosexual desire). And in camp, as well as in *montado* aesthetics, the body is first and foremost a container of desire: a yearning that is so strong, so undeniably true and uncompromisingly real, that at times one wonders whether this celebration of fake is all about the fuelling of such desires; whether the appeal of these aesthetic forms rests in their capacity to replace the lack in all world-making with the real of desire.

Baroque

Seen from another angle, the cultural production of the real that I found played out in the Beco dos Artistas might be understood as being 'baroque'. Introducing this term is to situate Gina da Mascar's performance in the dominant aesthetics of the old colonial capital of Brazil, where curve, excess, and over-the-topness is all over the place. It is to link the whirling, excessive style of Gina's appearance and shows with the exuberant golden ornaments that decorate the interiors of Salvador's churches; with the waving patterns of the *calçada portuguesa* that bedeck Bahian pavements; with the curly forms of relationality that Bahians opt for; with the preference for exuberance and glitz among the Bahian popular classes (which ethnologist Pierre Verger famously called the 'street-baroque' of Bahia); with the heightened sensuousness and bloody carnality of baroque religiosity; as well as with the endless celebrations and processions that punctuate the Bahian calendar, culminating in the collective ecstasy of Carnival (which inspired another commentator to qualify Bahia's baroque as a *barroco rebolado*: 'ass-shaking baroque').⁵ To point out the baroque of Gina da Mascar's performance is not, however, a mere attestation to the fact that she is heir to an aesthetic impulse that, for historical reasons, dominates the Bahian public sphere. On closer inspection, the particular understandings of the real that come into

being in a baroque register of world-making are strikingly similar to those that came to the fore in my discussion of camp and *montado* aesthetics.

A first similarity is that, just like camp and *montado* aesthetics, the baroque impulse underlines the 'concoctedness' of human-made worlds. This is immediately visible in the ways in which baroque artists celebrated the artificial and the 'mannerist' in their artistic productions. They were fascinated with the incongruent, the disharmonious, the monstrous; tended to indulge in excess, heterogeneity, fragmentation; preferred deceptive forms such as the labyrinth, the metamorphosis, the fold, the curve, the *trompe l'oeil*; as well as 'shallowness' – as in the opaque surfaces of the richly decorated façade – and 'emptiness' – as in the ample use of the emblem (Buci-Glucksmann 2002; Calabrese 1992; Deleuze 2006 [1988]; Ndalianis 2004; van de Port 2011). All these stylistic devices and strategies helped to convey an image of the world as a place that finds itself in a state of loss, a place that is lacking immanent meaning and at the brink of all-out fragmentation.

Some authors have suggested that this peculiarity of baroque expressivities must be understood historically. They argue that baroque aesthetics are expressive of the first cracks in that *sacred canopy* that had endowed the world with an aura of being self-evidently part and parcel of Divine creation (Berger 1967). The baroque came into being in the world of the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and religious wars: a world where 'convictions oppose and relativize each other' (de Certeau 2000 [1970]: 6) and where 'entire groups are no longer sure about "obvious facts" that were previously taken for granted by a social order and an organization of values' (2000 [1970]: 2). The baroque is also the art of the world of the voyages of discovery, which forced people to come to terms with new worlds, where strange peoples worshipped unknown gods (Valle 2002); as well as of a world where an emerging scientific paradigm sought to lure us out of our enchanted garden, and position us as inquisitive observers in front of the world (rather than in it). Given these historical circumstances, baroque forms are expressive of a world where a taken-for-granted omnipresence of the Divine is waning; an epoch in which people felt that the unquestioned, immanent presence of God in the world was vanishing. As Walter Benjamin (1977 [1963]) put it (and many authors after him): the baroque is permeated with the notion of an 'absent truth' (see also Cowan 1981; Wolin 1994). The truth and reality of the Divine was not (yet) questioned, but the God of the baroque had receded to an inaccessible plane, handing over the world to the imperfections of the human order. It is this very lack in the human capacity to render the world meaningful and coherent that is central to a baroque notion of what is real.

This brings me to the second similarity between camp and baroque articulations of the real. Clearly, the baroque worldview, which highlights the imperfection of human-made worlds, and puts an absent God centre-stage, plays on people's desire to establish a relationship with that God, the one power deemed capable of bringing about a *harmonia mundi*. Another set of expressive forms typical of the baroque sought to accommodate (and stimulate) this yearning. The famous *trompe l'oeil* ceilings of baroque churches are a good example. Baroque visuals, says Ndalianis, are characterized by a 'refusal to respect the limits of the frame' (2000: n.p). Expressing infinity, these ceilings underscore the gap between God and humankind. Yet, simultaneously, they speak to the desire to contact that unreachable God. Indeed, looking up to these ceilings, registering the slight dizziness they induce, the possibility to be connected to the infinite becomes sense-able. This fuelling of a desire to contact an absent God repeats itself over and over in baroque aesthetics. It is found in the feverish cults of the

saints, deemed capable of accessing the realm of the Divine, where they might act as mediators on behalf of believers (Araújo 2008); in the appeal of prophets and visionaries, so significant in Brazilian popular Catholicism (Narber 2003); in the baroque mystics with their ecstatic and erotic bodily languages, transgressing the norm to immerse in their object of desire; and, last but not least, in the constant references to the miracle, the 'impossible becoming possible' through which God affirms his power over the world ('I define the possible!'), but not his presence in the world (as the miracle always evokes an elsewhere beyond human comprehension).

Both these dimensions of baroque aesthetics are discernible in Gina da Mascar's performances. The drag queen who highlights the contingency of the cultural order in her constant unmasking of identities as mere posturing *also* evaluates her own existence in ecstatic, near-mystical utterings ('*foi babado, é um segredo só, é luxo!*', 'it happened, it is one big secret, it's a splurge').⁶ She juxtaposes the deceitfulness and inadequacy of cultural forms with a yearning for the *jouissance* and heavenly bliss of the orgasm. Sighing '*divino, divino*' after having performed fellatio on the microphone, she closely follows the baroque idea that the absent Divine is the sole force that is capable to bring about a *harmonia mundi*.

The resemblances between the *montado* aesthetics of the Beco dos Artistas and the baroque are hard to miss in a state like Bahia, known for its rich baroque heritage. However, the historical specificity of my case should not blind us to the fact that entanglements of the notion of baroque and camp are found in other places and settings as well (a recent exhibition of Jeff Koons's 'kitschy' and 'camp' artworks in the baroque palace of Versailles is a telling example;⁷ or the frequent characterization of Almodóvar's films in terms of both camp and baroque). This observation is in line with a recent call to consider the baroque as an aesthetic *impulse* that exceeds the specificities of time and place. As Omar Calabrese (1992) argues, the historical Baroque was but a particular manifestation of an aesthetic impulse that can be found in many epochs and places (the Hellenistic period in antiquity being the well-known example, the baroque mosques of Istanbul another). In Calabrese's view, the baroque is best conceived as a trans-historical 'category of the spirit', which sets itself up against the 'spirit' of the classic. A similar argument is made by the Dutch art historian Frank Reijnders, who, in a wonderful little book called *Metamorfose van de Barok* (1991), has shown how the spirit of the baroque lived on in the realm of fine arts as the anti-art, whose impulses kept (and keep) undermining romantic notions of art's totalizing visions of the sublime. Time and again, the baroque impulse sets out to show the falsity of the promise that the artwork enables the beholder to partake in the mysteries of the world. The continued relevance of baroque forms of world-making is also evidenced in the many postmodernist thinkers who have discussed and/or picked up the style, the ethos, and the sensibilities it expresses (Chiampì 1998; Day 1999; Ndalianis 2004).

This consideration of the baroque in more generalizing, trans-historical terms allows for the thought that camp/*montado* aesthetics and baroque are not so much two strikingly similar aesthetic registers, but rather two modalities of one and the same aesthetic impulse: the impulse to reveal, rather than veil, the breaches and impossibilities of the cultural orders that reign over our lives (cf. van de Port 2011). Like the naturalizing registers of world-making with which I opened this article, these registers, too, are caught up in what I have called the cultural production of the real. Yet these registers reject 'the natural' as the privileged form in which the real can be discerned.

'Real' is the human condition to have to make do with cultural forms that are forever lacking. 'Real' is the burning desire for something or someone who might undo this unhappy state.

The failure of cultural form

Pondering the particularities of camp/*montado* aesthetics and baroque registers in the cultural production of the real directed my attention to a rich anthropological literature from the 1970s on tricksters, fools, clowns, freaks, cross-dressers, jesters, anti-heroes, and other 'inverted' or 'anti-structural' characters. Re-reading Barbara Babcock's insightful work on symbolic inversions (Babcock 1975; 1978) and 'ritual clowning' (Babcock 1984) with the performances of Gina da Mascar in the back of my mind, I was immediately struck just how much these performances fit Babcock's descriptions of the 'trickster', who by his mere presence 'throws doubt on the finality of fact' (1975: 154) and reveals 'our stubborn unwillingness to be engaged forever within the boundaries of physical laws and social properties' (1975: 185).

'In almost all cases, and to a greater or lesser degree', says Babcock, 'tricksters are situated between the social cosmos and the other world or chaos' (1975: 159); they tend 'to inhabit crossroads, open public spaces, doorways, and thresholds'; 'are frequently involved in scatological and coprophagous episodes which may be creative, destructive or simply amusing'; oftentimes 'exhibit some mental and/or physical abnormality, especially exaggerated sexual characteristics'; 'have an enormous libido without procreative outcome'; 'have an ability to disperse and disguise themselves and a tendency to be multiform and ambiguous'; tend to be 'of uncertain sexual status'; 'follow the "principle of motley" in dress'; are 'generally amoral and asocial'; and 'in all their behavior, tend to express a concomitant breakdown of the distinction between reality and reflection' (1975: 159-60).

All of this immediately applies to Gina da Mascar. As I have pointed out, her shows in the Beco dos Artistas highlight the failure of culture itself, the lack that is at the heart of all meaning production. Everything she does seeks to remind her audience that the social-cultural classifications and orderings through which we come to a sense of normalcy are contingent and lacking. In the words of Barbara Babcock,

[T]he trickster tale affords an opportunity for realizing that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective. It is frivolous in that it produces no real alternative, only an exhilarated sense of freedom from form in general, though it may well provoke thought of real alternatives and prompt action toward their realization (1975: 184).

The fact that trickster tales are found all over the world (cf. Doty 1993; Radin 1956) indicates the apparent universal appeal of a figure that highlights a discontent with our condition of being cultural beings. Seen through the prism of the trickster debate, camp aesthetics, *montado* aesthetics, baroque aesthetics and, why not, the cultural analysis we do lose much of their specificity: they are instances of those 'counteractive patterns of culture' (Geertz 1973) through which people remind themselves that no cultural order manages to capture reality in its entirety, that symbolic closure is an impossibility, and that this very fact – while threatening dominant reality definitions – offers possibilities for change and renewal.

And yet, an analysis of a trickster-like figure such as Gina da Mascar should not conclude by pointing out how her performance can be inscribed into what seems to be

a universal repertoire. For the more interesting question to be asked – and it struck me that this question is never asked in the literature that I referred to – is how these trickster-like figures and anti-structural performances resonate with the particular biographies and life-experiences of the people who embrace them. Who are the people who appreciate the ‘real’ that styles such as camp and baroque articulate? And why is it that these particular people deem such understandings of the real persuasive? In other words, how are aesthetic preferences – the persuasiveness of the natural, the credibility of fake – connected to the histories and biographies of the people who display such preferences, and the subjective experiences that these histories and biographies bring forth?

The real of desire: derailed biographies and the persuasiveness of the made up

Esther Newton, in her classic study of female impersonators in the United States, makes the point over and over again: ‘Gay people ... know that the possession of one type of genital equipment by no means guarantees the “naturally appropriate” behavior’ (1972: 103). This knowledge, grounded in a process that is popularly known as ‘the coming out of the closet’, is key to an understanding as to why camp speaks to gays such as myself.

In the terms that were introduced in this article, the ‘coming out’ is the final step in a gradual process whereby a person comes to realize that he⁸ had been trying to make himself over to a symbolic order that did not acknowledge his sexual orientation. To come out is to acknowledge and make public an acceptance of the fact that the real of one’s inner experiences did not fit the symbolic order, and, conversely, that the reality conceptions of the symbolic order could not accommodate one’s inner experiences. Looking back at my own coming out, I can say that this breaking out of the social does at least two things to one’s perception of the world. First, it forces one to face the lack in the symbolic order. The world as you had been made to understand it had no place for your sexual desire. In other words, your narration of the world could not accommodate your experience of the world. Second, a coming out positions the real of desire over and above the real of one’s upbringing. In Lacanian terms, this means that the genuine is located beyond the symbolic order, in the dimension of being that is called the Real. As both points are important to understand the persuasive power of camp, I will elaborate them.

The simple fact that most homosexuals were never raised to be gay suggests that, however diverse histories of a coming out may be, they are all imbued with feelings of alienation. Coming out always implies a break with a Self that had been raised not only to be a heterosexual man, but to be *naturally straight*. After all, hetero-normativity is more than a collection of ideas and norms, given that these ideas and norms were naturalized by having been inscribed in the sensuous body. To turn boys into real men, boys’ bodies need to eat, drink, walk, sit, stand, gesticulate, look, dance, and speak in masculine ways (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]; Mauss 1973). Coming out of the closet implicates a breach with this natural, embodied masculinity, and leaves no other conclusion than that this ‘naturalness’ of masculinity was a mere sham. Unsurprisingly, then, gays are susceptible to a style that articulates a suspicion towards everything and everyone who claim the label ‘natural’. The shared experience of the *demasqué* of the symbolic order – an order that presents its definitions of gender and sexuality as ‘natural’, yet has proven itself to be an instance of make-believe – is exactly what camp articulates. There

is an immediate link between the derailed biographies of gays and their appreciation of a style that seeks to place everything between brackets.

Which brings me to the second point I want to make: the *demasqué* of the symbolic order directs the search for the real beyond the symbolic order, in the realm of desire. To come out is to subject oneself to one's desire, to declare this drive to be more genuine than social definitions of what is appropriate, 'natural' sexual behaviour for men. Clearly, embracing this desire is propagated in the gay scene, which tells you in a thousand different ways that 'you are your desire'. Yet Lacanians convincingly argue that there are dimensions to desire that cannot be encapsulated by the symbolic; and it is exactly because of these dimensions that desire becomes an anchor-ground for alternative notions of what is real. Terry Eagleton, for instance, suggests that we ought to disconnect desire from the object towards which it is directed, because it is thus that we are able to look at the force itself. This force, he says, reveals itself as 'an empty, intransitive yearning whose various targets all turn out to be arbitrary substitutes for one another' (1998: 13). *Pure desire* cannot be reduced to anything else. It does not pertain to the symbolic order. Eagleton takes it to be 'entirely without meaning and glacially indifferent to all the objects in which it invests, which it uses simply for its own fruitless self-reproduction', and describes it as a 'nameless hankering', 'unfulfillable by any of its particular objects', intent on 'simply keeping itself in business' and thus 'shattering whatever is hastily produced to keep it quiet' (2009: 156). And yet, for all of its ungraspable and non-articulable qualities, the real of desire is incontestable. 'In this it resembles death, which is also beyond representation – death is the last thing we experience, in more sense than one – while being at the same time brute reality' (1998: 13). Slavoj Žižek describes desire as a 'rock upon which every attempt at symbolization stumbles' and 'the hard core which remains the same in all possible worlds' (1989: 169). Moreover, this real of desire is something 'which I can experience from the inside of my body with incomparably greater immediacy than I can know anything else' (Eagleton 1998: 13).

An understanding of the cultural production of the real in denaturalizing aesthetics such as camp and baroque needs to take into account this particular dimension of desire. Highlighting the lack in the symbolic order, these aesthetics fuel a drive whose reality cannot be argued with, and which cannot be reduced to anything other. They keep desire centre-stage to introduce a sense of the real in a biography full of fissures and rents, and in a world where the made-upness of things is all too visible.

To illustrate the kind of stability that the real of desire may bring to a world where certainty seems absent, I might return once more to my own experiences as a gay man. If there is one thing in my life that I do not doubt, it is the direction of my sexual desire. That desire is directed towards men. I am myself rather puzzled by the unwavering and exclusivist goal-orientatedness of this desire. For whatever self-knowledge is worth, I know myself to be a person who doubts everything. Moreover, as an anthropologist, I have learned to deconstruct (and thus relativize) every essentialism that crosses my path.

And yet, I can only conclude that the direction of my desire – my homosexuality – is immune to all attempts to deconstruct it. As stated, I fully realize I am part of a homosexual subculture that instructs me to embrace this desire time and again; which has set up a whole industry to fuel that desire; which tells me in a thousand different ways that I *am* this desire. Yet these exhortations only take effect because they are grounded in that nameless, imageless, immaterial drive that is desire: a drive that had

manifested itself in me uninvited, unwanted, and in defiance of the way I had been brought up to see the world. That desire, I am able to tell myself, is not made up. It is genuine. That I find myself embracing that desire, making it the solid base of my identity, fuelling it over and over again, need not be surprising, for the foundation that it provides me with is unshakable.

Obviously, not only homosexual lives are marked by derailed biographies; just as gays are not the only people who had to part from a cultural order that had seemed natural and given. Recall Michel de Certeau's (2000 [1970]) insight that baroque forms spoke to the experiences of people in tumultuous times and places. These forms flourished in worlds where major revisions on humanity and the world were in the making; where people found themselves caught betwixt-and-between irreconcilable paradigms and enmeshed in violent social and political upheaval. If one asks what, in the case of Bahia, the specific life conditions were that fostered a receptivity for baroque renditions of the world, one immediately thinks of the region's immense slave population, subjugated to extreme powerlessness, and condemned to a life of gruesome, radical ruptures. Roger Bastide summarized the conditions underlying the life experiences of slaves in Brazil as follows:

The black was forcibly uprooted from his land, shipped to a new habitat, integrated into a society that was not his own, in which he had found himself in a subordinate economic and social position. Slavery shattered his African tribal or village community and its political organization and destroyed the forms of family life, leaving nothing of the original social structures intact. He entered a new system of stratification in which the white man occupied the summit, the free mestizo or the caboclo [person of mixed Brazilian and European ancestry] the intermediate level, leaving to him the lowest position of all, that of the slave (Bastide 1978: 43).

One can see why an aesthetics that rejects the possibility of harmony in a human-made world, and seeks redemption in an inaccessible beyond, must have had its appeal in a slave society such as Bahia. Yet one might also think of the tribulations that befell the Bahian population as a whole: the omnipresence of sudden and premature death in colonial society owing to natural catastrophes, epidemics, or sudden eruptions of violence – events that ravaged whole communities and left deep cleavages in people's life histories and trajectories.

Traumatic experiences and life-disrupting calamities and catastrophes feed the spirit of baroque, reinforce its impulses, animate its forms of world-making, lend credibility to its readings of the human condition. Indeed, there is an intriguing correspondence between discussions on calamities, the traumas they provoke, and the present discussion of baroque renditions of the real. Calamity has once been described as 'the unmistakable reminder that the affairs of this life are not of our own ordering' (Stavarakakis 1999: 68). In a similar vein, many authors have argued that at the heart of trauma lies the realization that the social, moral, and cultural orders that had always been taken for granted were in fact founded on make-believe. War, violence, epidemics, earthquakes, and other trauma-inducing events and occurrences cause 'the breakdown of the fabric of consensual reality [and the] coherence of everyday life' (Kirmayer 1996: 188–9); 'the shattering of a victim's fundamental assumptions ... the core of [his or her] conceptual system' (Janof-Bulman 1992: 53); 'the massive disintegration of the individual's symbolic world' (Janof-Bulman 1992: 60); and the loss of 'the basis that enabled victims to oversee and predict events and happenings in their life world' (MacFarlane 1995: 33). This loss of a stable 'world-reading' in trauma, the sudden revelation that the

world is not the place one had always thought it to be, strongly resonates with the baroque insistence on the absence of immanent meaning in human-made worlds.

Such examples suggest that the cultural production of the real through the register of the 'natural' is not always persuasive. The groups that I have mentioned have learned lessons about the falsity of that which presents itself as given and natural; and in their aesthetic preferences they testify to that understanding.

In conclusion

How do people come to a sense of the really real? How do they find ways to counter the contingency of all meaning? After decades of deconstructive labour in anthropology departments – a work that found traditions to be invented, authenticities to be staged, and communities to be imagined – these questions about subjective experiences of the real have gained an increasing urgency.

Studies on processes of authentication – or what I prefer to call 'the cultural production of the real' – have frequently pointed out the importance of 'naturalization': the veiling of the human-made character of reality definitions by recruiting signs of the natural. In this essay I have wanted to argue that there are other registers in the cultural production of the real. Focusing on the performances of the Bahian drag queen Gina da Mascar, I found camp and baroque to be examples of registers that reveal, in a most flaunting manner, the made-upness of the interpretative frameworks through which we get a grip on reality. As they unmask the natural as yet another fabrication, it may seem that these aesthetics are not at all in the service of the pursuit of the real. However, when we look at what these registers do at the level of the subject – i.e., what kind of experiences they produce – it turns out that they, too, are preoccupied with the cultural production of the real. Highlighting falsity generates an unshakable desire for that which is real. This desire is directed towards fantasy objects – the perfect man, true love, God, Divine intervention, the lost paradise – and it mobilizes the body to produce, in sexual or religious ecstasy, fleeting moments of *jouissance*, moments where experience takes one beyond classifications as to what is 'real' and what is 'false'. Yet what is more important, perhaps, is that desire itself realizes a sensation of the real: for the drive that is pure desire – deeply felt and undeniably present – is equally beyond the reach of the human imagination.

What naturalizing and denaturalizing aesthetics share is a pronounced distrust towards human-made worlds, the assessment that the symbolic order is the realm of make-believe, forgery, and deceit. Both contend that the symbolic order does not give access to the real. Denaturalizing aesthetics, however, are far more radical in their articulations of the real, as they dismiss the natural as yet another figment of the human imagination, and seem to push for an almost Nietzschean 'beyond all categories of thought'.

In order to find out who is susceptible to one or the other register in the cultural production of the real, a discussion of the subjective experience of cultural forms was necessary. I have suggested that groups with radical fault-lines in their (collective) biographies turn out to be susceptible to an aesthetics which underlines the fake of human-made worlds, and holds out the real of desire as the existential ground of being. Just as Western gays developed a camp aesthetics to come to a more persuasive notion of the real, peoples with war-ridden and trauma-inducing histories turn out to characterize their ethos – understood in Geertzian terms as 'the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood' (Geertz 1973: 127) – with terms that

refer to this ungraspable, tragically impossible, yet thoroughly enjoyable desire for the undoing of the breaches. Serbian *merak*, Bosnian *sevdah*, Andalusian *duende*, German *Sehnsucht*, Portuguese and Brazilian *saudade*, Turkish *hüznün*, and Armenian *karob* are all terms which declare the desire for an impossible wholeness to be at the heart of the nation and its subjects.

The more overall goal of this essay, however, has been to show the relevance of 'Lacanian' thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek, Yannis Stavrakakis, and Terry Eagleton for anthropological theory. Their proposition that the human condition is marked by the fact that we 'have to make do' with structures of meaning that are always lacking is a more promising starting-point from which to study the cultural production of the real than the anthropological insistence on the power and efficacy of cultural forms. To start one's analysis from the impossibility of symbolic closure is not to say that lack and incompleteness are the sole items on the list of human experiences. To the contrary, the very fact that people manage to come up with more or less coherent, stable, persuasive, and even 'authentically felt' notions of self and other, world and universe, forces the analyst to explain how such experiences of wholeness come into being. With their wonderfully insightful descriptions of the pivotal role of fantasy in covering up the rents, fissures, and black holes in the structure of meaning, and with their sophisticated discussions of the Lacanian notion of the Real, these thinkers offer important clues as to how anthropology might move its analytical capacity beyond the repetitive procedures of the constructivist paradigm.

NOTES

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¹ http://www.spitsnieuws.nl/archives/tech/2008/07/homodieren_in_artis.html (last accessed 31 May 2010, no longer available on-line).

² For an elaborate discussion of the use of natural tropes in discourses that seek to legitimate homosexuality, see Lancaster (2003).

³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAoLjj4gzfo> (accessed 23 August 2012). The following three interview extracts with Gina are also taken from this source.

⁴ Aldo Zeck told me he is not a *travesti* but a *transformista*, a difference he explained by saying that, unlike *travestis*, he only cross-dresses for the occasion. 'At home I don't dress as Gina', he said.

⁵ 'O rebolado barroco da nossa miscigenação. O fotógrafo baiano Silvio Robatto une sagrado e profano na Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo', *Correio da Bahia*, 12 March 2002.

⁶ As note 3.

⁷ See <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/o,1518,577388,00.html> (accessed 23 August 2012).

⁸ Or she, yet I would be curious to learn more about the resonance of camp (or the lack thereof) among lesbians.

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Authentiquement maquillé : « camp », « baroque » et autres esthétiques dénaturalisantes dans la production culturelle du réel

Résumé

Le lien établi de longue date par Jean-Jacques Rousseau entre « réel » et « naturel » reste indissoluble. Régulièrement, des constructions contemporaines du réel mobilisent tout ce qui peut être lié à la nature. À l'opposé, est inauthentique ce qui est fabriqué, maquillé, artificiel, qui découle trop manifestement de l'intention humaine. À Bahia, au Brésil, l'auteur a rencontré un mode complètement différent de production culturelle du réel. En analysant le spectacle d'une *drag queen* de Bahia nommée Gina de Mascar, il discute des registres du « camp » et du « baroque », qui suscitent une sensibilité aux formes culturelles « véritablement artificielles » et favorisent leur appréciation. Il montre comment les attraits de ces registres, leur pouvoir de persuasion, leur forme de vérité sont en résonance avec la sensibilité de ceux dont la biographie est marquée par des ruptures radicales, et avance que l'on peut comprendre ces registres comme une formulation populaire de la notion lacanienne selon laquelle la *clôture symbolique* est une impossibilité.

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